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ABSTRACT

This study for McLennan Community College (MCC), Texas, examines the issue of meeting the educational needs of the senior population of McLennan County. MCC aims to develop a Senior College. The Senior College would design classes specially for those age 55 and older, would make the classes affordable through use of expert volunteer instructors, and would make courses relevant to the students' era and stage of life. Classes would also meet primarily in the daytime, and scheduling locations and times would focus on senior population requests. Because people are living longer, and more than 33 million people in the U.S. are age 65 and over, MCC believes development of a Senior College at MCC and other colleges is appropriate to the community college mission of meeting the educational demands of the entire community. A one-page questionnaire was administered to members of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, in order to determine specific preferences in course topics and meeting days and times. Courses that received the most interest included travel, fitness, and computers. Most respondents preferred classes to meet once a week, in the mornings or afternoons. It was decided to have more focus groups to further specify some findings. Contains research instrument. (NB)

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What Senior Citizens Want From the Community College

Research Presentation

45th Annual Conference of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges

April 4-5, 2003

Dallas, Texas

ED 479 222

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II. Title of Presentation:

Action Survey: What Senior Citizens Want From the Community College

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III. Presentation Description:

The Board of Trustees of McLennan Community College identified the need for a Senior Program to meet the educational and enrichment needs of the senior population of McLennan County.

Subsequently, an action survey was administered in the spring of 2002 to a convenience cluster group of senior citizen residents of McLennan County to determine specific preferences in course topics, and meeting days and times. Supplemental focus groups were held in fall of 2002, to follow up on the results and obtain additional, and more specific, information.

The findings of this study may provide valuable insight to other colleges currently offering, or planning to offer senior courses.

IV. Content and Activities: ***See PowerPoint Presentation***

(This action research study was completed in November of 2002. All conference attendees will receive a notebook that will include a copy of the survey and the results, along with all other pertinent information.)

Presentation:

A. Background and Overview

Why the study was chosen, and how it was designed and administered

Over the past few years, the Coordinator of Community Programs, along with the Coordinator of RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) at McLennan Community College have shared and brainstormed a vision of a Senior College. Both parties have had multiple related requests and inquiries and became convinced that a special program designed specifically

for senior citizens would be a tremendous asset and service to the community. After the MCC Board of Trustees identified the development of a Senior College as a high priority, specific wants and needs were assessed through requests from area seniors to RSVP, phone calls to Community Programs, and recommendations from Advisory Board Members.

With more than 21% of the McLennan County population (approximately 45,000 people) identified in the age range of sixty and up, and with that percentage projected to increase significantly with the graying of the "baby-boomers," it would appear to be a good time to explore the community college's mission in education related to this special population.

Additional reasons for developing a Senior College at MCC, as well as at other colleges include:

- *People are living longer and have special wants and needs in later years*
- *More than 33 million a Americans are age 65 and over*[2]
- *Educational enrichment can assist people in achieving a higher quality of life, to age well*
- *To provide opportunity for community, for learning and sharing wisdom*
- *To provide a safe, high-quality, convenient and affordable environment for seniors to learn and grow*
- *To further fulfill the college mission of meeting the educational needs of the entire community*

How would Senior College classes be different from other personal enrichment classes?

- *Classes would be specially designed for age 55 and better*
- *Classes would be more affordable through use of expert volunteer instructors*
- *Courses and content would be relevant to era, stage of life*

- *Classes would meet primarily in the daytime*
- *Scheduling locations and times would focus on senior population requests*

An action survey was designed and administered to a convenience cluster group of senior citizen residents of McLennan County to determine specific preferences in course topics, and meeting days and times. Supplemental focus groups were held to follow up on the results and obtain additional, more specific, information. The research group felt that this information would be helpful to other colleges currently offering senior courses, or to colleges considering such courses.

B. The Instrument *(See PowerPoint)*

The Instrument was a one-page questionnaire administered to members of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program at their annual recognition luncheon.

C. The Results / Focus Groups *(See PowerPoint)*

Some of the findings were as expected, for example more seniors prefer to take classes in the daytime. However, the survey findings provided specific, needed information and several surprises. College researchers discovered that several of the areas assumed to be of interest to the senior population actually were of little or no interest. Interestingly, the focus groups revealed that many seniors were interested in credit degrees and certificate programs.

E. Conclusions

Senior citizens are highly interested in courses designed and offered specifically for their target population. Offering senior courses is a worthwhile endeavor and is generally consistent with the mission of the community college system. Developing senior courses may be the best strategy for community colleges to maintain the voting, financial and community support of this ever-growing segment of the population.

Action Research Survey: What Senior Citizens Want From the Community College

Robert C. Cloud, Baylor University: **Purpose**

Paul Illich, McLennan Community College: **Methods & Results**

Mary Landon Darden, Baylor University: **Focus Groups**

In the spring of 2002, the McLennan Community College Board of Trustees identified the development of a Senior College as a high priority.

Potential Reasons for a Senior College:

- *People are living longer and may have special wants and needs in later years*
- *More than 33 million Americans are age 65 and over*
- *13% of Americans are age 65 or over, by 2020 the percentage will be 21%*
- *More than 21% of the McLennan County population (approximately 45,000 people) identified in the age range of sixty and up*
- *Educational enrichment can assist people in achieving a higher quality of life, to age well*
- *To provide opportunity for community, for learning and sharing wisdom*
- *To provide a safe, high-quality, convenient and affordable environment for seniors to learn and grow*
- *To further fulfill the college mission of meeting the educational needs of the entire community*
- *Senior Citizens are tax-payers, and they VOTE!*

- How would Senior College classes be different from other personal enrichment classes?

- *Classes would be specially designed for age 55 and better*
- *Classes would be more affordable through use of expert volunteer instructors*
- *Courses and class scheduling would be based on survey results*

Population

- **All Senior Citizens in McLennan County**
- **Sample:** Convenience / Cluster
  Distributed questionnaires to Senior Citizens attending the annual McLennan County regional RSVP Recognition Luncheon
- From 1000 attendees, 111 surveys were returned
- Although this sampling method represented a fast and affordable way to obtain survey results from seniors, it is recognized that this method is not randomized

The Instrument

Survey / Questionnaire

The Heading:

- **We are exploring the possibility of a Senior College at McLennan Community College!**
- ~ And we need your advice ~
- ***Please answer the five questions below, your name should be included if you would like to be in the door prize drawing.*** **Thanks!**

Features

- **Simple & Short:** *no more than 5 minutes*
- **Used Large Print**
- **Kept on a Single Page**
- **We Asked the Advisory Boards for suggestions on questions**

1. **Please Circle the courses you would be interested in from the Proposed Areas of Focus below. Add any additional interests or comments in the blank below:**

a. Fitness for Seniors *- Walking, Water Exercise, Resistance Training*
b. Writing *- Memoirs, Creative Writing, Getting Published*
c. Computer Course for Seniors - How to get started, how to buy a computer, basic programs -- all taught by a senior
d. Senior Services - What is available to seniors and how to access those services
e. Financial Management - Basics of day-to-day money management, scam alerts, investing information
f. Special Fine Arts Performances: Afternoon music and theatre performances -- free to Senior College students
g. Cooking: *Gourmet Cooking, Cooking for One, Meals for Diabetics*
h. Defensive Driving and Driving Safety
i. Personal Safety
j. Seniors Re-entering the Workforce
k. Leadership for Seniors
l. Community Building/Volunteer Opportunities
m. Inter-Generational Projects
n. Spiritual Growth and Mind Building
o. Dancing / Senior Individuals
p. Senior Band
q. Arts and Hobbies
r. Social Activities Seniors
s. Legal Issues Effecting
t. Medicare Information
u. Travel for Seniors - *Texas Wildflower Tour, Museum Tour, Other_____.*
v. Other (please list or make comments) _____

_____

_____

(Please circle answers)

2. I would like for classes to meet:

a. mornings b. afternoons c. evenings

3. Best days for classes:

a. Mon. b. Tues. c. Wed. d. Thurs. e. Fri. f. Sat. g. Sun.

4. I would prefer to meet my class:

a. once per week b. twice per week c. three times per week d. daily

5. Your Name

(optional for drawing): _____

Please Print

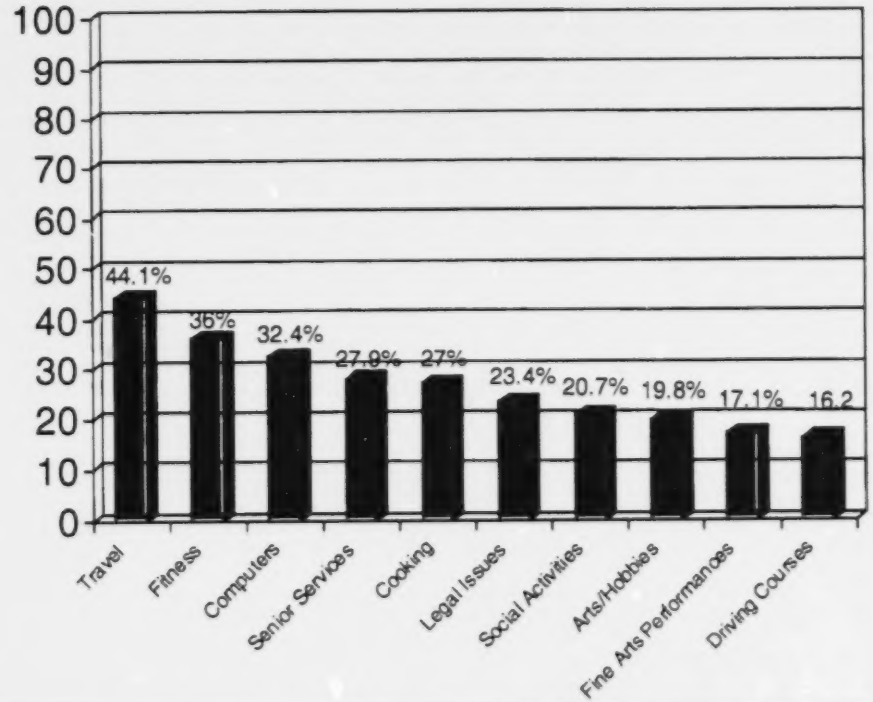
Purpose of a Senior College: To offer specially designed courses and activities to meet the educational and life-enrichment wants and needs of the senior community of McLennan County.

Seniors would have a low-cost, per/semester registration fee that will allow them to participate in any of the Senior College courses and activities for that semester at no additional cost other than any necessary supplies fee or travel costs.

Survey Results

Percentage of Respondents Interested in Courses

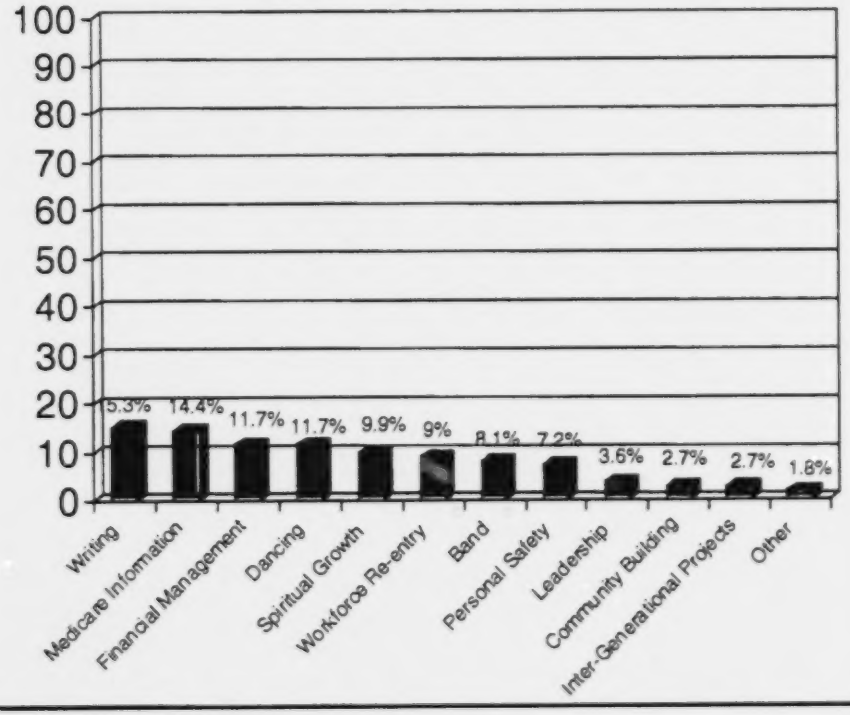
Courses that Received the Most Interest



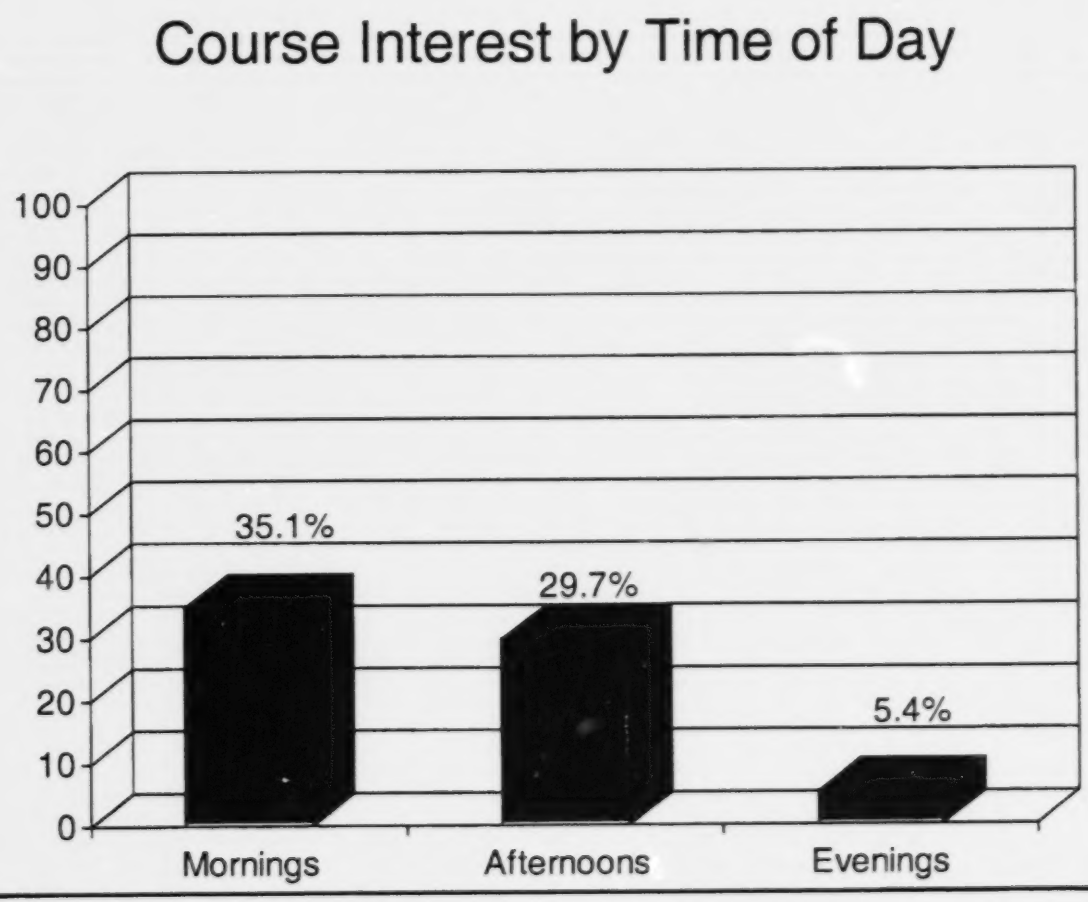
Survey Results

Percentage of Respondents Interested in Courses

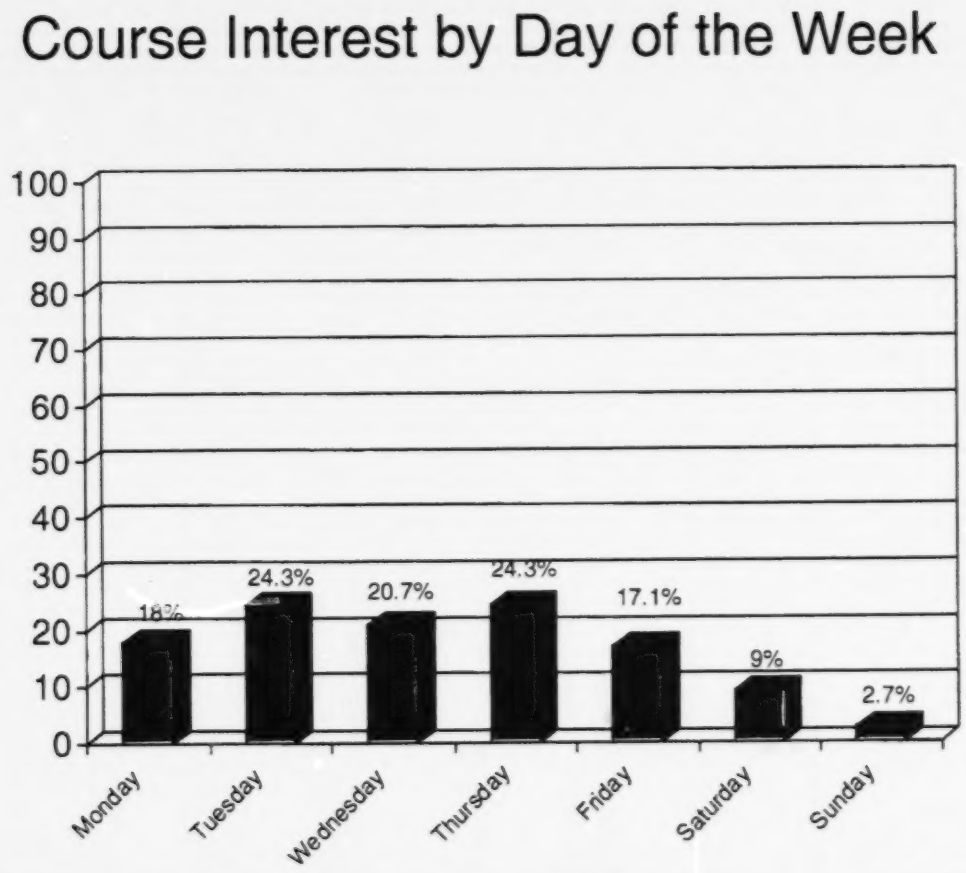
Courses that Received the Least Interest



Survey Results

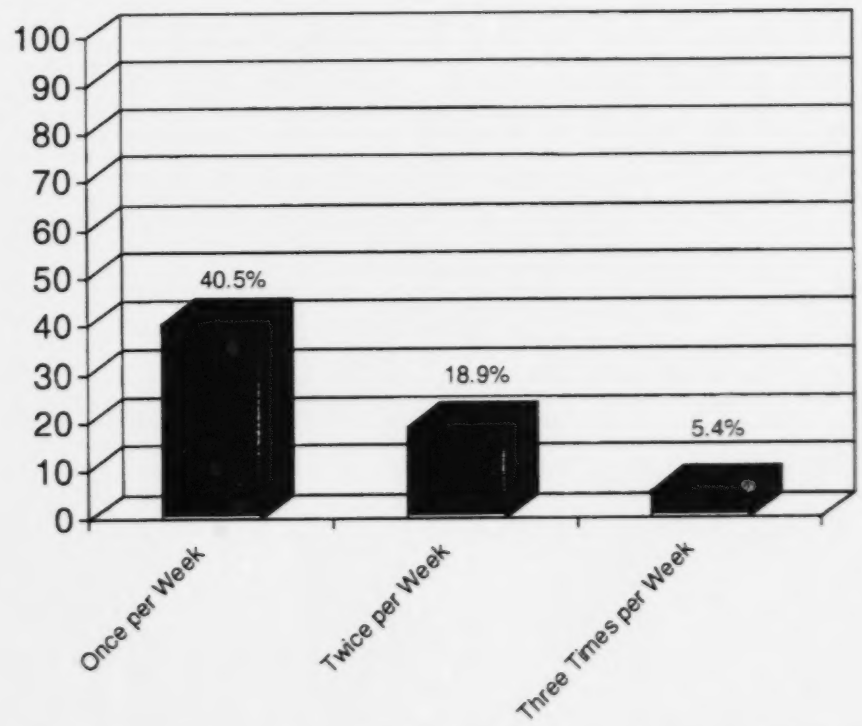


Survey Results



Survey Results

Course Interest by Frequency of Class Meetings



Observations From Survey Results

- Respondents expressed the greatest interest in travel and fitness courses
- About a quarter of respondents indicated an interest in courses related to legal issues. It is not clear what specific issues might be of interest to seniors.
- The courses listed on the survey were continuing education type courses
- For 16 of the 22 courses listed, less than a quarter of respondents expressed an interest
- Not clear why more respondents were not interested in courses

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Focus Groups

We decided to have two focus groups to:

- Further specify some findings
- For explanations and further understanding of results
- Dig further to see what we might have missed

Focus Group Questions

- The survey results showed that respondents were interested in travel courses, what type of travel or related courses should the college offer?
- What type of fitness classes are you most interested in?
- What are some of the specific health and legal topics that you would like to learn more about?
- About a third or less expressed an interest in a variety of courses including computer classes, social services, and financial management. What topics might be more appropriate for the target audience?
- Should these classes be offered as "senior only" classes?

Focus Group Results

Types of Travel Courses:

- **Horticulture / Nature**
- ***Historical Tours***
- ***Vineyards***
- ***Museums****

Focus Group Results

Time-Period for Travel:

- Leave about 8:00 a.m. and … back by 5:00 p.m. … be home before dark

- Overnight Bus Trips

- Three-Day Trips

Focus Group Results

Additional Travel Locations:

- *Day trips, to Tyler for the Rose Festival, or the Dogwood trail… the Hill Country… and Salado.*
- Branson, MO
- *Planetarium at the Science Museum in Fort Worth**
- *The Institute of Texas Culture**
- *State Fair musicals**
- *The symphony in Dallas and Fort Worth, / Bass Hall / a performance in Austin**
- *Glen Rose**
- *Bob Bullock Museum in Austin**
- *Cruises – Short (3-day)**
- *Amtrak to Chicago, train trips (1-2 days)**
- *Mexico**
- *Texas Wildflowers**

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Focus Group Results

Fitness Classes -- Types/Features/Comments:

- *Water Exercise, Weight Training, Yoga, Tai-Chi, Walking,...anything with dancing.*
- *Fibromyalgia, Arthritic, low impact aerobics*
- *(a) type of membership where they have the equipment that is going to help their needs ... have the walking classes where it's a safe path, where groups of them are going to go...a membership pool club. Have time frames that would meet their needs**
- *We're not that agile...take it slower*

Focus Group Results

Important / Interesting Points:

- ***Courses with peers,***
  designed specifically for seniors

- ***Preferred Size of Groups –***
  Maximum of 20-24

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Focus Group Results

Marketing / Materials Tips:

- Carefully title and describe courses so that they do not intimidate or sound too difficult (particularly computer classes)

- Use larger fonts on handouts, at least "14," because most seniors are somewhat vision impaired.

Focus Group Results

Ideas:

- Begin a retired-computer lending service to seniors to help them get started with computer operations (use computers that are no longer being used on campus)*
- *(Have) students in (the) building program … do some added work, at a reasonable, minimal cost (for seniors)**

Focus Group Results

The Surprise:

- **There is interest in credit and certification classes, specifically designed for seniors**

Focus Group Results

Various Additional Courses of Interest Mentioned:

- Learn to Read
- Math
- Insurance Forms – All About
- Writing Wills
- Personal Media and Technology Basics
- Medicaid/Medicare
- Cooking for Diabetics (at lunchtime)
- *Wills, estate planning, living wills, have a lawyer come**
- Avoiding Scams -- Have Better Business Bureau talk about scams to look out for… who to call …a list of people in the community if you have a question you can call*
- *how to deal with phone solicitors**
- *how to take care of pets, what pets not to have**
- Home Safety for Seniors*

Limitations of the Study

- Sampling method was not randomized
- Response rate was only 11%
- Survey did not include questions necessary to determine whether respondents were representative of population
- Survey did not include specific questions related to interest in credit versus continuing education classes
- Interest in courses was determined based on a 'yes/no' format

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